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DEPT FOR INL/LP, WHA/CAR

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TAGS: ASEC KCRM PGOV SNAR TD

SUBJECT: LACK OF RESOURCES MAKES TOBAGO A DRUG-SMUGGLER'S PARADISE

Classified by Deputy Chief of Mission Len Kusnitz, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Trinidad's sister isle of Tobago continues to be a "soft" area for the transshipment of illegal drugs to Western Europe and the U.S. The anti-drug fight on Tobago is hampered by a lack of local of resources, with most GOTT anti-crime/anti-drug personnel and assets devoted to much larger Trinidad. End Summary.

What Are The Problems?

¶2. (C) Tobago comprises six percent of total area and four percent of the total population of the twin island nation of T&T. As such, the anti-drug fight there is often overlooked by GOTT authorities, who devote only limited human and financial resources to that island. However, DEA here believes roughly 25% of T&T's total illicit drug shipments transit Tobago, usually passing through that island from Trinidad and then continuing on to their final destination. With only eight Organized Crime Narcotics Firearms Bureau (OCNFB) officers permanently assigned to Tobago, two Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TPPS) seaport officers, and one Trinidad & Tobago Coast Guard (TTCG) vessel, drug runners take advantage of relatively open territory.

¶3. (C) DEA officials also cite the lack of detection equipment at both the Crowne Point airport and the Scarborough seaport. The ion scanners at the airport have not functioned for some time and there is only one surveillance camera. With baggage handlers, service people, and attendants suspected of involvement in smuggling, law enforcement officials are unable to keep an eye on what is happening. The situation is no better at the seaport. Typically one TPPS officer, without regular canine presence and no other detection equipment, oversees the twice-daily arrival of 800 passengers and 200 automobiles. In a recent visit, PolOff further noted there were no radios to communicate with either the TTCG or TPPS headquarters (a phone is used). Lack of deterrents may be emboldening smugglers to attempt bigger shipments, perhaps as indicated by a recent discovery of 10 kilos of cocaine in a duffel bag.

¶4. (C) Another obstacle for anti-drug forces to overcome involves corruption. With only 50,000 inhabitants on Tobago, often someone in the smuggling pipeline knows a law enforcement official and can seek to influence him/her, be it through bribes or threats. According to DEA officials, the Tobago Coast Guard unit also is riddled with corruption. Additionally, OCNFB officers complain that T&T Customs does not provide access to the bonded area for parcel shipment. This is a growing concern as DHL recently opened for business in Tobago and UPS is expected to follow. Acting Commissioner of Police James Philbert is aware of the dire situation and has assured EmbOffs of his intent to remove rogue cops and otherwise improve the situation on Tobago.

What Is Promised

¶5. (SBU) The GOTT has announced plans to increase resources targeted at the Tobago crime and anti-narcotics struggle, partly driven by

concerns that the tourism industry there will be undercut if it does not act. Assistant Commissioner of Police for Tobago Fitzroy Fredericks has said he hopes to increase the number of police on Tobago by 150 (the force currently numbers 250). In addition, a recent press release from the National Security Ministry promised a greater police presence at the port of Scarborough, introduction of joint patrols between the TTPS and the Trinidad and Tobago Defense Force, establishment of a permanent Tobago canine unit (none now exists despite our efforts to start up a unit), and the intent to have the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) investigate Tobago crimes.

Comment

¶6. (C) Comment: More detection equipment is needed at the airport and seaport, including surveillance cameras, a permanent canine presence and better communications gear. In addition, the Coast Guard needs to step up patrols and root out corruption. Post will continue its dialogue and assistance program to help close gaps on Tobago (and Trinidad), but making positive changes in the local situation will remain an uphill battle.

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